

Tree Committee report to the Board of Managers
May 6, 2014

This report is in response to two questions: (1) whether the Village should deem certain tree species as "undesirable" and thereby allow their removal to be permitted by the Village Manager and (2) whether some incentive should be offered by the Village to encourage new plantings by residents who remove trees pursuant to an administrative permit.

The Committee sees the two questions to be inter-related. The two questions also invite a broader consideration of programs the Village might adopt to promote planting and care of canopy trees on private property. Several of our neighboring townships have adopted such programs.

First, some background. In 2012, when revising the Village Urban Forest Ordinance to establish the Tree Ordinance Board (TOB), provisions were added to the Code to authorize (a) the Village Board to determine certain species to be "undesirable" and (b) the Village Manager to issue permits for removal of a tree otherwise protected by the Ordinance (i.e. 24" or greater in circumference) if an undesirable species even though it is healthy and poses no hazard.

The Town of Chevy Chase maintains such a list, which is appended to this memo, and authorizes its Manager to issue permits for their removal. Your Tree Committee has reviewed the list. While we agree that some of the cited species truly are a nuisance, we believe others (principally white pine, most varieties of spruce and Norway maples) may include specimens which contribute significantly to the Village canopy and landscape. Our recommendation, therefore, is to adopt a more limited list which would include evergreens typically used for screening and a few species like Mulberry which are smelly or messy.

While wishing to streamline the permitting process, members of the Board have also been concerned about the number of takedowns and the consequent loss of canopy. In the year concluding March 31, 2014, 110 trees were administratively approved for removal. In the prior year, the number was 126 and in the year prior, 189. These are in addition to the 16 trees approved for removal following appeals to the TOB and Village Board. We do not have information as to the number of trees which may have been planted to fill in the spaces left by the 441 trees removed but expect that it may be less than half.¹

Your Tree Committee does not believe that owners who have already born the expense of removing a tree that is dead, diseased, and hazardous or an "undesirable species" should be required to replant but it does believe that the overall goal of maintaining Village tree canopy merits incentives to encourage replanting in these cases. It has considered two strategies to encourage planting new native-species canopy trees:

1. Waiving the otherwise applicable permit fee, now \$50 per tree; and
2. Providing either a tree or cash assistance to defray roughly half the overall cost of a tree's installation.

¹ Scanning the list of trees approved for takedown, it appears that about one quarter were of a species that might be classified as "undesirable" (chiefly arborvitae, Leland cypress, mulberry and pear). Replanting in these cases would likely be with small screening trees. Another 10-20% appears associated with a development project that likely co-opted the space where a replacement might have been planted.

For a fee waiver incentive to be meaningful, the Committee recommends that the permit fee be raised to \$100. In this case, if half of those residents removing trees were to opt to replant, providing this incentive would be revenue neutral - i.e. involve no net cost to the Village.

For canopy to be restored within a reasonable length of time, the Committee recommends that the eligible replacement tree be a canopy specimen of 2.5" caliper. Purchase and installation of such trees will typically run about \$350 (net of currently available state and county subsidies of \$25 each). A \$5,000 increment to the Tree budget should therefore permit the Village to meet half of the cost of roughly 33 trees.² The Committee believes that this would be a worthwhile investment and recommends that such assistance be coupled with the fee waiver to provide a significant incentive to reforestation.

The Committee recognizes also that owners not removing a tree but wishing to add one to their property might feel that this assistance should also be extended to them. The Town of Chevy Chase in fact provides such assistance, as has the Village in a few cases as well (e.g. when a site on a front lawn has been found to be the only practical way to maintain the streetscape due to a very narrow Right-of-Way planting strip or particularly difficult overhead wires). The experience of the Town has been that roughly 20 residents have sought Town assistance for canopy tree plantings per year so an additional \$3,000 budget increment should be adequate to permit this additional benefit to be provided Village residents as well.

There are additional steps that are being taken by our neighboring jurisdictions to encourage good maintenance as well as planting of canopy trees. The Committee believes that several merit consideration for implementation within the Village and proposes to advance recommendations in a later report.

Respectfully submitted, Sam Lawrence, chair, on behalf of the Committee

² A \$150 contribution by the Village added to the \$50 state/county subsidy would cover half the cost of a \$400 tree.

Town of Chevy Chase List of Undesirable Tree Species

CCV Tree Committee recommendation in italics

1. Mulberry – Morus alba

Reason – These trees grow rapidly and have weak wood. They become very hazardous when large.

Agree: also messy

2. Boxelder – Acer negundo

Reason – These trees grow rapidly and have weak wood. They become very hazardous when large.

Agree: also multi-stemmed, shrub-like

3. Black Locust – Robinia pseudoacacia

Reason – These trees develop cankers in the trunks and become very hazardous when large.

Disagree: a native species which is vulnerable to disease and, if diseased is eligible to be administratively approved for removal.

4. Black Cherry – Prunus serotina

Reason – These trees are susceptible to many pests and diseases, are relatively short-lived, and become hazardous as they mature and are large.

Disagree: for same reasons as above

5. Bradford Pear - Pyrus calleryana 'Bradford'

Reason – The Bradford Pear has poor branch structure that causes failure of the tree as it matures and becomes large.

Agree

6. Tree of Heaven - Ailanthus altissima

Reason – Tree of Heaven is a very fast growing tree with weak wood, is prone to excessive breakage, very messy and invasive to other trees.

Agree

7. Norway Maple - Acer platanoides

Reason – Norway Maple is a poorly structured tree, prone to breakage, easily injured leading to wood decay and is invasive to other trees.

Disagree. Though not a desirable native tree, mature specimens do contribute to canopy and, if diseased or hazardous, are eligible for administrative takedown approval

8. Leyland Cypress – Cupressus x leylandii

Reason - Planted as a quickly growing screening tree. Matures to a large tree with the base branches dying back, no longer providing screening and very hazardous near homes in wind, ice, and snowstorms.

Agree

9. False Cypress – Chamaecyparis spp

Reason – Planted as a screening tree. Matures to a large tree with the base branches dying back, no longer providing screening and very hazardous near homes in wind, ice, and snowstorms.

Agree

10. Virginia Juniper – Juniper virginiana

Reason – Planted as a screening tree. Matures to a large tree with the base branches dying back, no longer providing screening and very hazardous near homes in wind, ice, and snowstorms.

Conditionally agree¹

11. Arborvitae – Thuja occidentalis

Reason – Planted as a screening tree. Matures to a large tree with the base branches dying back, no longer providing screening and very hazardous near homes in wind, ice, and snowstorms.

Agree

12. Canadian Hemlock – Tsuga Canadensis

Reason – Planted as a screening tree. Matures to a large tree with the base branches dying back, no longer providing screening and very hazardous near homes in wind, ice, and snowstorms.

Conditionally agree¹

13. White Pine – Pinus strobus

Reason – Planted as a screening tree. Matures to a large tree with the base branches dying back, no longer providing screening and very hazardous near homes in wind, ice, and snowstorms.

Disagree. Can be a fine tree and should be considered on a case by case basis

14. Spruce – Picea

Reason – Planted as a screening tree. Matures to a large tree with the base branches dying back, no longer providing screening and very hazardous near homes in wind, ice, and snowstorms.

Disagree. As with pine, can be a fine tree. Consider on a case-by-case basis

¹ The Va. Juniper and Canadian Hemlock when grown as a single tree with adequate space can develop into fine trees. When planted close to one another for screening purposes, they are likely to be weak and outlive their usefulness in 15-20 years